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76th plenary meeting
Friday, 21 March 2014, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ashe ..... (Antigua and Barbuda)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Beck (Solomon Islands), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 7 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The Acting President: I draw the attention of the General Assembly to resolution 68/151 of 18 December 2013, calling for a special meeting in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Members will recall that, at its 70th plenary meeting on 18 December 2013, the General Assembly concluded its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 67. It will be necessary to reopen its consideration in order to hold this special meeting.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 67?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: Members will further recall that at its 2nd plenary meeting on 20 September 2013, the General Assembly decided to allocate sub-item (a) of agenda item 67 to the Third Committee.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to consider sub-item (a) of agenda item 67 directly in plenary meeting and proceed immediately to its consideration?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 67 (*continued*)

Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

(a) Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

Commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The Acting President: I am pleased to be here today on behalf of the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, John W. Ashe, who regrets that he is unable to take part in this commemorative meeting. The President is well aware that the scourge and pain of racism are still widely prevalent around the world and that the many ignorant manifestations of racism take a heavy toll on our world and its progress.

As we observe the 2014 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, we call to mind those whom we honour today: the 69 people who died at the Sharpeville massacre — men, women and children who lost their lives in the quest for equality and dignity; those whose deaths galvanized the world to act to end apartheid. Fitting to the theme of this year's commemoration of the role of leaders in combatting racism and racial discrimination, we also call to mind the great spirit of Nelson Mandela, who left us in December. His unending determination to bring equality to his people is a legacy we are all called

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to carry forward. Today we feel the pain of those who continue to suffer racism and racial discrimination throughout the world. Today is a reminder that the elimination of racial discrimination is possible, and indeed some might say it is inevitable.

In December 2013, we celebrated the sixty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of one of the most important landmark human rights instruments of our times: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The anniversary was marked by ceremony, but at the same time we must concede that humankind continues to struggle with the affirmation contained in article 1 of the Declaration that:

> "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

That dichotomy of recognizing a truth in theory and actually living it in practice is very much present in our world today. On the one hand, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has inspired a growing body of human rights instruments, which are mechanisms to monitor and reinforce its implementation, which in turn is strengthened by national protection systems. Yet, on the other hand, racism still affects our societies, and human rights are still routinely violated.

As many people still face discrimination on those grounds, even as we hold today's commemoration, we know that poor, vulnerable, marginalized populations and minorities are continually discriminated against based on their race, colour or national origin. Too many suffer from persecution and are denied equal access to the law and recognition before the law. Such violations occur far too often.

One positive step would be to fully implement and operationalize the instruments we already have in place. In the nearly five decades since the General Assembly proclaimed the first International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination of 26 October 1966 and despite the three Decades to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination previously declared by the United Nations, the programmes of action for the Decades have not been fully implemented, and their objectives remain unfulfilled. Each time, in spite of near-universal ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, too many individuals and communities continue to suffer from the stigma and systematic effects of racism. A lack of effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action has hindered efforts to effectively eradicate the scourge of racism worldwide.

Racism is a global problem and requires global action, and there are a number of important ways we can continue to work towards the elimination of racism worldwide. In that regard, we look forward to seeing the draft programme for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent which will be developed by the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. This important Decade will begin in 2015 and will create an opportunity to mobilize the world's energy to promote equality for the people of African descent and contribute to greater economic and social development, social justice and inclusion. We also hope to use the opportunity in four days of the commemoration of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and the abhorrent practice of slavery as a reminder that contemporary forms of racism remain all too pervasive in our societies.

We must redouble our efforts to ensure that, just as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls for all people to be free from servitude and slavery, today's debate on racial discrimination can also contribute to the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda. That agenda should emphasize eliminating discrimination in laws, policies and practices as well as combating all forms and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and eliminating violence and hate crimes against particular groups.

Paragraph 3 of Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations calls for respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. Guided by the United Nations Charter and paragraph 3 of its Article 1, the General Assembly adopted resolution 68/151, which has brought us together for today's special event. It shows Member States' continued commitment to the fight against racism. Let us remain steadfast in our efforts. Let us turn theory into practice. Let us honour those who have died and those who work for justice and equality. May the legacy of Madiba inspire all leaders and all peoples of the world to work tirelessly towards a world free of racism.

I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson.

The Deputy Secretary-General: At today's important meeting commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, I am honoured to share with the General Assembly a message from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

I applaud the Assembly for its focus on the state of racial discrimination worldwide. I would like to state from the very beginning that the Secretary-General and I consider ending racism to be a priority for the United Nations every single day of the year. I hope the Assembly will allow me to offer a few of my own thoughts on that important topic, but first I shall read out the message of the Secretary-General:

> "This year, the world commemorates the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination for the first time following the death of former South African President Nelson Mandela. This sad reality is also a reminder of his courageous struggle against apartheid and his inspiring victory over the racist forces that had imprisoned him for 27 years.
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> "The General Assembly, in a show of solidarity with the anti-apartheid movement, established this Day to commemorate the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre, when 69 people were killed and many others injured as police opened fire on a peaceful protest against South Africa's appalling pass laws.
>
> "Nelson Mandela's journey from prisoner to President was the triumph of an extraordinary individual against the forces of hate, ignorance and fear — and it was a testimony to the power of courage, reconciliation and forgiveness to overcome the injustice of racial discrimination. He chose Sharpeville for the historic signing of South Africa's new Constitution in 1996. On that occasion, President Mandela said,
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> > 'Out of the many Sharpevilles which haunt our history was born the unshakeable determination that respect for human life, liberty and well-being must be enshrined as rights beyond the power of any force to diminish.'
>
> "Today, we remember Sharpeville as a symbol of the terrible toll of racial discrimination, and we honour those who lost their lives during the massacre. At the same time, we recall that President Mandela framed Sharpeville's legacy as an unwavering resolve to protect the dignity and rights of all people. The lessons of South Africa's staunch defence of equality 'out of the many Sharpevilles' in the country's history can be applied anywhere in the world, not only in response to organized, institutional forms of racism but wherever the pernicious problem occurs, including in daily interpersonal relations.
>
> "I call on all people, especially political, civic and religious leaders, to strongly condemn messages and ideas based on racism, racial superiority or hatred as well as those that incite racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. On this Day, let us acknowledge that racial discrimination remains a dangerous threat and resolve to tackle it through dialogue inspired by the proven ability of individuals to respect, protect and defend our rich diversity as one human family."

That concludes the Secretary-General's message.

Since the Sharpeville massacre, the United Nations has made strong efforts to prevent and combat racism and racial discrimination. We honour those who have fought discrimination and we commemorate the victims of appalling historical injustices. On that point, I want to commend the work of the Permanent Memorial Committee established to carry out the initiative to erect a permanent memorial to the victims of the transatlantic slave trade at United Nations Headquarters. I urge full support for the realization of the meaningful vision of "Forever free". We must always remember the terrible price that is exacted when we discount everyone's equal value.

Still today, the violation of fundamental human rights continues to undermine the dignity, the well-being and the physical safety of far too many people in our world. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance are on the rise in many communities across the world. We see frequent violent attacks, incitements to hatred and hate speech against people of different ethnicities and perceived races. It is a collective responsibility — but primarily that of States — to address racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance before those problems explode into open conflict. We must see those warning signs. We must see those vibrations in the ground when we start

to divide humanity into "us" and "them". That is when the dangers start.

We must act at that stage. That was the whole idea behind the recent "Rights up front" initiative that the Secretary-General asked me to present to the Member States for all of us to work on. All parts of the United Nations system must join forces for the greatest possible impact. I am gratified that the United Nations network on racial discrimination and protection of minorities brings together over 20 United Nations entities in a crucial common cause.

The decision of the General Assembly to announce the International Decade for People of African Descent is testimony to our collective resolve to unite against racial discrimination. Next month, the work will begin on drafting the programme for the Decade, which is set to start in 2015. The decade offers a very special opportunity for the world to come together and promote equality for people of African descent, and thereby to contribute to development, social justice and inclusion. Of course, that has wider ramifications, sending the message of every human being's equal value.

In closing, let me say that we are fortunate to have the opportunity to hear today from Ms. Gay McDougall, who has dedicated her career to ending discrimination. Over the years, she has provided a great deal of wise professional advice to the United Nations. We are deeply grateful for her invaluable work, which I have personally followed over the years in different capacities. At one meeting here, she said,

> "Within the chambers of the United Nations, the tragedy of racism is often described in broad and at times impersonal terms, but the reality can be found in countless personal tragedies and struggles faced every day by individuals, families and communities in every country."

As we discuss international efforts to address racial discrimination, we must never forget that ultimately it is a scourge that strikes at the dignity and rights of individuals and that it tears at the fabric of our societies and even the fabric of international cooperation. Fighting racial discrimination is thus a collective as well as a personal responsibility for all of us. Let us resolve to speak out against racial discrimination in all forms, large and small. Let us denounce all slurs, all discriminatory practices and all attacks in our loudest voices. And let us together build a world of true equality.

The Acting President: I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for delivering the message of the Secretary-General and for his statement.

In accordance with resolution 68/151 of 18 December 2013, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was invited to speak at this commemorative meeting. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is unable to be here with the Assembly today due to her participation at a similar meeting in the framework of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. Her message will be made available on the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

I should now like to consult members with a view to inviting Ms. Gay McDougall, first United Nations Independent Expert on minority issues, former expert member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and former Special Rapporteur to the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, to make a statement at this meeting in accordance with resolution 68/151 of 18 December 2013.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Ms. McDougall to make a statement at this meeting?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now give the floor to Ms. Gay McDougall, first United Nations Independent Expert on minority issues, former expert member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and former Special Rapporteur to the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

Ms. McDougall: As was expressed so eloquently in the statement delivered on behalf of the Secretary-General, on this day in 1960 police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid pass laws in Sharpeville, South Africa. This day originally commemorated the lives lost in the fight for democracy and equal human rights in South Africa during the apartheid regime. Since the defeat of apartheid, this day has been an occasion to remind the international community of its solemn duty to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

Over the decades since the Sharpeville massacre, 176 countries have ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, with 87 signatories. Its treaty monitoring body, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, has counseled and sometimes prodded countries, one by one, to implement their obligations under the Treaty and to make the promise of the Convention real in the lives of all people. I was privileged to serve on that Committee for four years.

In 2001, the third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, made a critical contribution. There, Governments acknowledged that racial discrimination existed in every country and in every region, and that the fight against racism was an international priority for all nations. The past abuses of the transatlantic slave trade and the system of colonialism were addressed in what was an historic discourse. Equally important, the Conference developed a picture of what racial discrimination looks like in the twenty-first century.

The problem of racial discrimination was defined as not solely one of bias, in the sense of personal prejudice, but rather as one of social and economic exclusion, placing the emphasis more fundamentally on economic and social rights. Racial discrimination was placed squarely in the context of globalization and the economic disparities that exist along racial lines both within and between countries. Economic exclusion was seen as a cause and a consequence of entrenched discrimination against certain racial and ethnic minorities in both developed and developing countries.

For many civil society and affected groups, the Durban Conference was a hugely empowering experience. New networks were born and new momentum was created, which was then carried back to communities. Connections were made between the situation of African descendants in the diaspora, Roma, Dalits, migrants and indigenous peoples. Out of those exchanges and the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination have come a number of key understandings and necessary approaches.

We understand that global challenges, such as the worldwide financial crisis, global food shortages and climate change, have exacerbated problems faced by racialized communities. Austerity policies and budget cuts hit those at the bottom of the economic strata with greater impact. People in poverty lack reserves to ride out tough times or natural disasters. Also, times of economic crisis increase social pressures to blame those who have the least power. Those tendencies can lead to hate speech and violence against disadvantaged communities and can also threaten democracies by giving rise to racist policies or even racist political parties.

Discrimination is now more broadly recognized as a key determinant for poverty. Marginalized racial groups are disproportionately concentrated in low-skilled, low-wage, informal sectors such as domestic work, agricultural labour and street vending — sectors that are generally unprotected by labour laws and social security. Now we see more clearly the complex burdens borne by women — burdens of poverty, ethnic prejudice and gender-based restrictions, all overlapping in ways that form profound obstacles.

In addition to the disempowering personal impact that racial prejudice has on its victims, it is critically important to understand its structural nature. In societies where racial prejudice has been endemic over many eras, it becomes self-perpetuating in the institutions that determine social advancement and economic survival. This key understanding about the structural nature of racial inequality must be central to fashioning remedies. Of course, it is essential to have comprehensive antidiscrimination legislation and strong enforcement institutions with procedures that can be initiated by the victims themselves or their representatives.

Additionally, there should be a comprehensive approach that recognizes the importance of tackling legal regimes, policies and practices that have a negative disparate impact on communities disadvantaged by racial discrimination, regardless of intent. Governments should undertake robust special measures to address disparities in the participation of racial groups in economic life. Aggressive programmes should be developed, especially in the fields of employment, education and training, financial services, land tenure and property rights. Labour protection and social security policies should be extended to low-wage and informal sector workers.

Affirmative action measures should be undertaken within a broader comprehensive equality strategy, which should cover a spectrum of legislative initiatives with targeted budgetary supports, including benchmarks and quotas. Decisions on policy choices should be

made in meaningful consultation with disadvantaged groups. They should be transparent and supported by disaggregated data that reveals the existing inequalities.

Now more than ever, the banners in demonstrations for racial justice in countries around the world call for the right to work, the right to housing, an equal right to quality education and the right to a living wage. This is the case in countries with economies still developing as well as in countries with highly developed economies.

Finally, it is encouraging that there is a growing consensus within global development institutions about the importance of addressing the current extremes in both income inequality and poverty levels. One experience that gives rise to this lesson is that efforts in some countries to meet the Millennium Development Goals have failed to change the realities of many groups who are victims of endemic discrimination.

As the international community looks to the future, it is a hopeful sign for the racial justice and economic rights movement that one of the core principles for the post-2015 sustainable development agenda is to leave no-one behind. But we must all work extremely hard to make these words into reality.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Guinea-Bissau, who will speak on behalf of Group of African States.

Mr. Da Gama (Guinea-Bissau) (*spoke in French*): I welcome the presence among us of the Deputy Secretary-General and thank him for his statement on behalf of the Secretary-General and himself.

We align ourselves with the statement to be made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

(*spoke in English*)

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the African States in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the theme "The role of leaders in combating racism and racial discrimination". The symbolism of this theme is not lost on us, as the legacy of one of Africa's iconic leaders, the late Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, has been a driving force in the elimination of racial discrimination in his own country, South Africa. The African Group welcomes this annual event as an opportunity not only to join collective efforts in raising awareness about the pernicious impact of racism but also, more important, to assess progress in our common struggle to combat racism and racial discrimination through the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

In taking stock today, some people may argue, perhaps justifiably, that we still have a long way to go in combating that scourge; but we would all agree that, without strong and sustained leadership, all the best blueprints, legal instruments and institutions will remain blunt tools.

It should be recalled that the aim of this commemoration is, inter alia, to mobilize political will at the national, regional and international levels and to reaffirm our political commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the outcome document of the Durban Review Conference, as well as their follow-up processes at all those levels.

Allow me to conclude by reaffirming the African Group's commitment to continuing to contribute to global efforts towards the total elimination of racism and racial discrimination.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tonga, who will speak on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group of States.

Mr. Tupouniua (Tonga): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 55 States members of the Asia-Pacific Group as Chair for the month of March.

At the outset, we would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this special meeting to commemorate and observe this important day, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. We would also like to thank Ms. Gay McDougall for the statement that she has just delivered. Ms. McDougall's deep knowledge and experience in the field of racial discrimination speaks volumes for the invitation to her to be with us today to commemorate this important occasion.

It is clear to us that the core international human rights instruments place obligations on States to positively work towards eradicating discrimination in the public and private spheres. Related to that, the principle of equality also obliges States to adopt specific measures that serve to eliminate the conditions that sustain or contribute to the prevalence of racial discrimination. That premise is one of the foundations of this International Day. Together we have agreed that we must fight against such prejudice with the greatest

determination and perseverance, as it continues to tarnish our humanity. The struggle against racial discrimination is a fight for human rights and dignity.

The fact that we have gathered here today in this Hall speaks to the truism that our leaders have stayed true to the collective will to triumph in the struggle and fight to eliminate racial discrimination. Our commemoration and observance of this Day today must serve as a reminder of the need to sustain and persevere in that commitment and to further invigorate our collective efforts in the pursuit of the elimination of racial discrimination. That is especially true as we encounter new and varied challenges in this day and age. Such challenges must, however, be seen as secondary to our common goal and aspiration of freeing the world and its victims, both silent and heard, of the scourge of racial discrimination.

The eyes of the world, in particular those of victims, are upon us again today. We therefore celebrate this Day not only to mark our successes in our common approach towards eliminating racial discrimination from among us but also to reaffirm our concern. The occasion also serves to ensure that we are aware that much work remains to be done. The new challenges manifest themselves in the many forms of racial discrimination. Traditional manifestations have taken the form of war, conquest, slavery, the oppression of indigenous peoples, genocide, ethnic cleansing and other atrocities. However, there are more subtle expressions of racial discrimination that manifest themselves through realities such as discriminatory laws and social practices that affect the lives and livelihoods of entire communities throughout the world. Such practices have resulted in continuing poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization and socioeconomic exclusion. There is therefore a need and a call for a new unity in our common approach. Racial discrimination cannot simply be wished away, but must be seriously addressed with the accompanying political will and action.

The theme of this year's commemoration and observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is "The role of leaders in combatting racism and racial discrimination". The theme is apt, appropriate and timely. State action, mobilization and social change cannot be genuinely carried forward in that regard without the positive decisions and actions of our leaders. Our leaders provide the political will and means to ensure that the struggle and fight to combat racism and eliminate racial discrimination are achieved. Our leaders have the responsibility to ensure adherence to, and the full and effective implementation of, the relevant international human rights instruments so as to address the scourges of racism and racial discrimination. Laws and social practices that are racially discriminatory should be phased out or abolished. It is up to our leaders to mobilize our collective will at the national, regional and international levels, together with the requisite support of all stakeholders in the private sector and civil society organizations, in order to make the fight against racism and the elimination of racial discrimination a success.

Finally, on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Group, allow me again to declare and reiterate our strong commitment and unwavering determination to ensure that the role of our leaders, for the sake of all victims, is to make sure that the struggle and fight for the elimination of racial discrimination remain a high priority in our respective countries and throughout the world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bulgaria, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Tafrov (Bulgaria): I would first of all like to thank all previous speakers for their moving words about Nelson Mandela. He is a shining example of human dignity for millions of people across the world and, if I may say, my personal hero.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States. We welcome this year's theme of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, namely, "The role of leaders in combatting racism and racial discrimination", as we believe that leaders can and must play a key role in mobilizing the political will to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Leaders have the authority and capacity to promote greater respect and trust among the various groups within society. With their vision and insight, they can help to tackle hatred and extremism by building unity in the face of such threats.

The Eastern European States have repeatedly demonstrated their commitment to fighting against racism and racial discrimination, which remains a priority of our human rights agenda. We are deeply concerned that the objective to eradicate racism has not yet been attained. Despite the many efforts,

much remains to be done at the national, regional and international levels.

We would like to reaffirm that the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination is, and should remain, the basis for all efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate racism. We reiterate the fundamental importance of ratifying and fully implementing the Convention, which should be a priority for all countries. While we recognize the important role of the international community that that end, we would like to underline that the fight against racism is the primary responsibility of the State and that each country should take effective measures at the national level.

In his latest report in follow-up to resolution 67/155 (A/68/564), the Secretary-General highlights that some progress has been made in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, but still no country can claim to be free of challenges, posed by those phenomena. As pointed out in the latest report (A/68/329) by Mr. Mutuma Ruteere, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, no country is immune. Our countries are no exception: we face our own challenges with regard to discrimination, hatred and violence on the basis of perceived racial, ethnic, religious and other differences.

At the same time, we have adopted a number of policy and legislative measures to fight against racism and racial discrimination and other ways to penalize and ban incitement to racism, xenophobic violence or hatred. We are particularly concerned, however, that a great number of hate crimes remain unreported. As such, they are not prosecuted and the perpetrators are not punished.

The Eastern European States are also supportive of the work of civil society organizations in this area, including their activities aimed at raising public awareness on the importance of fighting against racism and xenophobia.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the global fight against racism and racial discrimination is an issue of concern for all countries. The international community must be united in the fight against this scourge. We hold the view that the global effort for the total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance can succeed only if we work together to achieve that common objective.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Chile, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Gálvez (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC).

The GRULAC countries reiterate their support for the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. We emphasize the urgent need for its effective implementation as a solid foundation for the total elimination of racism and racial discrimination, scourges from which, unfortunately, not a single society can consider itself definitely exempt.

Consequently, our countries acknowledge the importance of the Durban follow-up mechanisms for the full implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action. In that regard, we agree on the need and importance of addressing new forms of discrimination. We therefore support the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of Complementary Standards to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Our countries want to highlight the pertinent focus of the Secretary-General's recent report (A/68/564) related to xenophobia, national mechanisms against all forms of racism and on procedural gaps in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination — crucial issues in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

The countries of our region are made up of multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual societies. We have a large and growing population of people of African descent, which has been estimated at more than 150 million people. Despite the progress achieved in promoting the rights of people of African descent, there are still many important challenges that hinder their full inclusion under equal conditions and opportunities. In that vein, we are proud to announce that at the end of the year 2013, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States proclaimed the International Decade for Latin American and Caribbean People of African Descent as of 1 January 2014. Its aim is to strengthen regional and international cooperation to guarantee the human rights of people of African descent, including in the areas of education, health, identity, dignity, cultural values and economic and social development.

Likewise, GRULAC States members have welcomed the General Assembly's proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent, to begin on 1 January 2015 under the theme "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development". We call on all Member States to work constructively for the preparation of a comprehensive and effective programme of work. We believe that the decade will provide an opportunity to promote the concrete implementation of the main provisions set out in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action as well as of the International Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in order to achieve the full and effective inclusion of all people of African descent.

Along the same lines, we would like to highlight that a recent regional meeting of Latin American and Caribbean States on the International Decade for People of African Descent was held in Brasilia this year with the participation of representatives of Government, experts, civil society, social movements and international organizations, aimed at promoting cooperation among the countries of our region in order to coordinate a common agenda on those relevant issues.

Those efforts by GRULAC Member States reaffirm our determination to promote the full inclusion of people of African descent in our societies, to commit to the wider goal of overcoming racism and discrimination and, in so doing, to effectively advance towards the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. McLay (New Zealand): It is good to see a Pacific face, Sir, in the Chair in the course of this very important debate.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States in commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, a day when we join with all regional groups and others in expressing our solidarity in the fight to end racial discrimination.

Racial discrimination strikes at the very heart of the concept that should unite us all, that is, that all men and women are born free and equal in dignity and in rights. Over the years, we have seen inspirational leadership on the issue, apartheid — against which those brave unarmed and peaceful demonstrators in the township of Sharpeville protested 54 years ago this very day, which the Vice-President referred to in his comments on behalf of the President of the General Assembly's — has been defeated.

As the President has also emphasized, we would be remiss if we did not mention the role of Nelson Mandela, who courageously led the campaign against apartheid and institutionalized racism in South Africa and whose memory is a constant reminder that leaders, whether they be political or community leaders, have an important role in combating racism and racial discrimination. They perform vital roles in shaping social attitudes.

Leadership has been crucial when developing both international and national frameworks aimed at the elimination of racism. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination provides us with an international framework to combat racism. Many States also have in place national protection systems.

However, despite that progress, we are still a long way from eliminating this scourge. Racism, xenophobia and intolerance remain in all societies. We need principled and continuing leadership to ensure the effective implementation of the frameworks that we have and to continue to develop new practical tools to tackle the issue. We must find ways to talk to young generations to educate them to better understand, celebrate and enjoy the world's diversity.

In that regard, we welcome the United Nations "Let's fight racism!" social media campaign, launched in 2011. The initiative reminds us that the fight against racial discrimination is also very personal, because our own perceptions and our own prejudices can contribute to racial prejudice.

That is a sobering reminder. But it is also empowering, as it tells us that there is something we can all do, that each and every one of us can and must at a personal level play a role in breaking down racial prejudice and intolerant attitudes. The "Let's fight racism!" campaign provides a global mechanism to facilitate individual and civil society involvement.

We must join forces to end racism: all of us in this room. And we must do so at an international level, at a national level and at a personal level.

Mr. Ngculu (South Africa): I would like to thank the President for convening this special meeting of the General Assembly in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the African Group earlier today.

Let me also express my delegation's appreciation to Ms. Gay McDougall for her participation and efforts in advancing the anti-racism agenda. Indeed, it was the expectation of my delegation that there would be this level of participation by eminent persons active in this area.

Since 1994, 21 March has been commemorated in South Africa as a human rights day and it is a public holiday. The South African Government chose Sharpeville, in the Gauteng province, as the venue to launch South Africa's new Constitution, signed by its first democratically elected President, Mr. Nelson Mandela, on 8 May 1996. The Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Government of South Africa states that,

> "Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken."

This day commemorates the lives that were lost in the fight for democracy and equal human rights in South Africa during the apartheid regime — a regime that embraced racial discrimination. As we know, Nelson Mandela represented the millions enslaved by the shackles of racism. We can no longer pretend that racial discrimination is a figment of the imagination, in a world where heightened racial consciousness confines millions to the margins of global society.

The stage was set for Mr. Mandela to emerge from prison and play his historic role. He did so with extraordinary grace, conviction, goodwill and success. All those developments helped to convince South Africans that the best option would be a common constitutional dispensation in which whites would inevitably lose their exclusive power, but in which the fundamental rights of all South Africans would be protected by a strong Constitution.

As Nelson Mandela taught us,

> "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his or her skin or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and, if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love. For love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

Our non-racial constitutional democracy is Mandela's greatest monument. The most enduring monument we can build to Mandela's memory is to stay true to his ideals, including his unwavering commitment to justice, equality and non-racialism.

Posterity will look at the current generation in the light of the Mandela experience. If we fail, it will not make sense to future generations that while Mandela evolved into a solid morale force that urged humankind higher on the plane of civilization, those who followed him either failed to live up to his philosophy or simply destroyed his dream.

In commemoration of this historic day, President Jacob Zuma earlier today said,

> "We have worked hard together to promote human rights that many paid for with their lives. But while we have a good story to tell, there is still a lot more to be done to improve the quality of lives of our people."

In memory of those who lost their lives because of the scourge of racism, let us build a better world together, using the lessons learned over the years.

Mr. Patriota (Brazil): Let me thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this special meeting. Let me also thank Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson for his statement and for reading out a statement on behalf of the Secretary-General. Let me also thank Ms. Gay McDougall for her very inspiring words.

I wish to begin by paying tribute to the memory of Nelson Mandela, who conducted one of the most important processes of emancipation of humankind in contemporary history — the end of apartheid in South Africa. Madiba's legacy of racial reconciliation and tolerance remains an inspiration. He taught us that no one is born hating others and that love and solidarity should and can be more enduring human traits. Through a message of forgiveness and forbearance, Mandela has not only built one of the major multi-racial and multi-ethnic democracies in the world, but also become one of the most influential voices of his age.

Although apartheid — the most heinous form of institutionalized racial discrimination in the recent past — was officially dismantled 20 years ago, racial discrimination remains. Over the past years, national and international laws have been implemented so as to forbid racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and overcome centuries of racial subjugation. A landmark in that regard was the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, the so-called Durban Conference and its review conferences. As a direct result of the Durban Conference, 11 years ago on 21 March, Brazil established a Ministry for the promotion of racial equality, geared towards implementing policies aimed at combating prejudice and discrimination and creating equal opportunity for all.

More than three centuries of slavery have seriously impinged upon the population of African descent in Brazil. The effects are still visible in our society. Brazil has the largest population of black persons outside of Africa. As of 2013, they accounted for over 100 million people, and that number is expected to rise to over 115 million by mid-century. Although they represent the majority of the Brazilian population, a great proportion still live in unfavourable conditions on the outskirts of large Brazilian cities, subsist on lower incomes, have access to a lower level of education and, according to statistics, their sons and daughters are three times more vulnerable to violence.

Over the past 10 years Brazil has recorded great success in redressing social and racial inequalities, having lifted over 36 million people out of extreme poverty through governmental assistance policies. Seventy-five per cent of the new middle class is of African descent. Whereas in 2002 only 38 per cent of the middle class was made up of Afro-Brazilians, in 2012 they accounted for more than 50 per cent of the Brazilian middle class population.

Notwithstanding the historic relevance of those achievements, we acknowledge that persistent racial inequality, manifestations of racism and racial discrimination related to past atrocities remain. That is true not only for Brazil, but also for many other countries.

The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 is our road map for the elaboration on the post-2015 sustainable development goals. It places fundamental emphasis on the eradication of poverty and the achievement of sustainable development in its three dimensions, namely, the economic, social and environmental.

As the wheels are set in motion for a development agenda for after 2015, the international community should aim at strengthening the view, on the one hand, that diversity is an asset and, on the other, that we are all bound together by a common humanity, regardless of race, colour, gender, identity, social origin, faith, disability or political opinion. Our enemies in that context are the old and new avatars of intolerance and all exceptionalist mind sets.

In that spirit, Brazil welcomes the proclamation by the General Assembly of the International Decade for People of African Descent, which is intended to raise awareness in combatting prejudice, intolerance and racism against the segment of the human race that has been systematically discriminated against and still deserves special attention and solidarity. But let us not forget that many other segments continue to suffer discrimination. Ms. McDougall mentioned the Roma, indigenous people and migrants. But I wish also to recall the abominable resonance of terms such as Islamophobia, anti-semitism and homophobia.

As we recall Mandela's unmatched achievements, let us also recall that the true champions of freedom of a universal appeal are often ones who do not conform to the status quo. Let us make this struggle our struggle. Let us search for Mandela's example inside each and every one of us, and also praise the anonymous heros of the everyday struggle against racial discrimination from the past and the present who have upheld their values and fought for a more just, more equal and more humane world.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in this commemorative meeting. I would like to thank all speakers for their statements marking the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 67?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.